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Viewing cable 10KYIV168, UKRAINE: LOW PROFILE FOR SECURITY ISSUES IN THE

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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
10KYIV168	2010-01-29 13:06	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Kyiv

Appears in these articles:

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 KYIV 000168

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/28/2020
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [MARR](#) [UP](#)
SUBJECT: UKRAINE: LOW PROFILE FOR SECURITY ISSUES IN THE
ELECTION CAMPAIGN

REF: A. KYIV 0107
[1](#)B. KYIV 0128

Classified By: Ambassador John F. Tefft, Reason 1.4 (b,d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. In contrast to the 2004 elections, issues of national security and defense remain notable by their absence in this year's presidential campaign. Ukrainians are focused

on the economic crisis and the election's potential for reconfiguring Ukraine's political power relationships. All candidates have supported a transition to a professional army and the abolition of compulsory military service, but it was not until the final days of the first round that opposition leader Yanukovich and Prime Minister Tymoshenko elaborated much detail in their positions. Several candidates said that traditional European security and political structures have exhausted their potential. Only third place finisher Tihipko and President Yushchenko regularly highlighted strategic and foreign policy issues in their public statements. Anatoliy Hrytsenko, a former Minister of Defense and head of the Rada Defense Committee, appeared in fatigues in his campaign posters, but his low-profile campaign hardly registered with voters. End Summary.

Geopolitical and Security Issues Largely Absent

¶2. (C) Throughout the campaign period, candidates presented national security largely in terms of economic and social security. Matters of international security, defense and regional stability generally received only broad formulaic attention and generated little public debate. Political analysts with whom we spoke lamented the low profile of these issues.

¶3. (C) Director of the xxxxx told us that, with the European and global security landscape in greater flux and uncertainty - including due to Russia's reassertion of its political ambitions and world view - attention of the candidates to defense and security concepts is critical. Yet "no one," she said, was talking about them, just at the moment when they matter most.

¶4. (C) xxxxx and xxxxx, Director of the xxxxx, each pointed out that Ukraine will not receive NATO or EU membership over the next 5-7 years or longer. However, the course of European security will be shaped during this period. Now is the time for Ukrainians to care, they assert. According to xxxxx (and backer of President Yushchenko), the problem is simple voter apathy toward anything other than the scandal-oriented political commentary and debate that has marked post-Orange Revolution Ukraine.

Yanukovich

¶5. (C) Viktor Yanukovich's campaign, like Party of Regions' legislative agenda over the past few years, focused primarily on domestic social welfare and economic/business issues. His defense platform cited "defense reform", transition to a professional force and abolition of compulsory service, military right-sizing -- in line with Ukraine's "economic potential" rather than resulting from review or analysis of threats and opportunities -- and social benefits for military academy graduates.

¶6. (C) Yanukovich pledges a non-aligned Ukraine -- a member of neither NATO nor the CSTO -- within a multipolar "new world order". In a private discussion with Ambassador Tefft, Yanukovich held open the prospect of continued military cooperation with NATO and spoke of cooperation with Ukraine's military industrial sector. In another conversation with Ambassador Tefft(ref A), Yanukovich spoke of resetting relations with Russia but continuing to build ties with Washington. Yanukovich has stated publicly (and privately to us) that the future of the Black Sea Fleet would be decided in a way that would satisfy both Ukrainian and Russian interests, while protecting Ukrainian economic interests. Yanukovich's advisors tell us he would be open to extending the Black Sea Fleet's lease in Sevastopol if Russia offered attractive terms, with substantially increased rent.

Tymoshenko

¶7. (SBU) Yuliya Tymoshenko's official campaign platform only went so far as to promise to cancel conscription, moving to a professional army based on contract "principles," and to

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allocate "sufficient material, equipment, and finances" to "strengthen (Ukraine's) combat power." Tymoshenko has subsequently claimed that the Armed Forces receive adequate funding. Her foreign policy views have focused on economic policy, achieving European living standards with EU membership to follow, with only a succinct note that there will be "friendly relations" with Russia and the CIS, and any collective security arrangements will be decided by referendum.

¶8. (SBU) In summing up her positions with the press on the eve of elections January 14, Tymoshenko pledged that under her leadership Ukraine would join the EU in five years, and achieve an Association Agreement and Free Trade Agreement by the end of 2010. She also said that the future of the Black Sea Fleet "will be determined in strict accordance with the Ukrainian Constitution." She took a position categorically against recognition of South Ossetia and Abkhazia as independent nations. Outside the context of campaign stumping, Tymoshenko has consistently emphasized the importance of Ukraine's participation in the EU's defense policy. With public support for NATO at only about 20 percent, Tymoshenko largely avoided mention of NATO in the campaign.

Serhiy Tihipko

¶9. (C) Serhiy Tihipko is the come-from-behind candidate who moved into third place, garnering 13% of the vote on January 17. Meeting with the Ambassador on January 21 (ref A), Tihipko said Ukrainian public opinion is not ready for NATO membership. He advocated vigorous MoD engagement with NATO and adoption of NATO standards, and said MoD should focus on improving its capacity "to the maximum", but political leaders should avoid talk of NATO membership.

¶10. (C) Tihipko said that as long as the current leaders rule in Russia, NATO membership will be impossible for Ukraine. The Kremlin would unleash a fifth column and destabilize the country if membership were close. Tihipko's campaign rhetoric has been clear that Ukraine "should give up (its) intentions to become a NATO member" and "stop wasting (its) time trying to secure NATO membership."

¶11. (C) Throughout his campaign, Tihipko voiced a pragmatic approach to Ukrainian foreign and security policy that emphasized a constructive role for the country based on its own national economic interests, and rejected existential debates about political allegiance to Europe or Russia. He used that perspective to advocate more clearly and frequently his vision of an independent Ukraine acting rationally and independently on the world stage than any other candidate, save Yushchenko.

¶12. (SBU) Tihipko sees a clear role for Ukraine's military-industrial complex in Ukraine's economic recovery and in creating the strong military he believes is needed "to protect the peace." Ukraine needs to win respect in its foreign policy, including a "reboot" of relations with Russia (to be achieved in particular through joint military-industrial projects). Ukraine requires a new military doctrine based on the "threats and realities of the modern world," and a professional army effectively trained at all levels with an effective reserve corps. Tihipko has strongly criticized Ukrainian deployment to ISAF, saying that Ukraine has "no use for this war." He has argued that "the U.S. and its allies are defeated" in Afghanistan.

Lytvyn and Hrytsenko

¶13. (C) Some expected former Minister of Defense and head of the Rada Defense Committee Anatoliy Hrytsenko, after a series of campaign ads featuring himself in camouflage gear, to continue with his normally pro-NATO, pro-Western rhetoric. On the contrary, Hrytsenko's campaign was a low-profile grass-roots effort that focused on the economic and political issues more immediate to the electorate. Nevertheless, Hrytsenko's campaign materials made it clear that he believed Ukraine must be prepared to "go it alone" without NATO or the EU in the near term. In his post-election meeting with the Ambassador on January 22 (ref B), he predicted that cooperation with NATO would continue, but Ukraine would not be able to be a particularly effective partner.

¶14. (SBU) Speaker of the Rada Volodymyr Lytvyn early on took the position that Ukraine should stop seeking NATO membership, as the issue divides the nation. Furthermore, he urged that the Russian Black Sea Fleet remain in Ukraine

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after 2017 as a guarantor of Ukrainian security. Neither candidate polled well with voters, however.

The Importance of Military Technical Cooperation

¶15. (C) Prominent Ukrainian xxxxxxxxxxxx argues that while security issues did not play a role in the election campaign, the candidates are keenly sensitive to the condition of and fading economic potential of Ukraine's aging military-industrial complex. In his view, Ukraine's strategic orientation will be most greatly influenced by offers of tangible cooperation in the aftermath of the elections, regardless of the ultimate winner. Russia, he said brings so much more to the table in terms of long-term deals, purchases, sales, technology transfer, compatibility and interoperability, and the ability to revitalize Ukraine's military-industrial complex. Practical ties are what will decide Ukraine's future allegiances. NATO is a theoretical concept, and all politicians have come to agree that Ukraine needs the capacity for independent defense.

Comment

¶16. (C) Until the final days of the campaign, issues of foreign and security policy were rarely raised by the press or brought to the fore by the majority of the presidential candidates. Nonetheless, the 2010 election is likely to mark a shift in the country's longer-term strategic orientation from the path laid out by Yushchenko in 2005. To the extent that the candidates have commented on the strategic future for Ukraine, the emphasis has been on achieving some sort of balance that will be acceptable to Moscow.
Tefft